Journey of Change

Education Equity in the K-12 System

2000 – 2001 Report
Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission

November 2001

Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2001

Donna Scott, Chief Commissioner and Director
Lynn Archdekin, Deputy Chief Commissioner
Marjorie Hutchinson, Commissioner
Christine Lwanga, Commissioner
Darren Winegarden, Commissioner

"What has occurred is the development of systems built around the needs of the majority culture and a failure to recognize, until recently, that the needs of minority cultures are being bypassed. Education equity calls upon the education system to recognize those different needs and respond to them."

SHRC, Education Equity Report, September 1985

"We believe that education has the ability to empower each person and to create the conditions for full and equal participation, opportunity and benefit in society. In making the challenge of education equity a shared priority, the education system is strengthening its commitment to the development and well-being of all children and youth, and making a vital contribution to the well-being and prosperity of all the province's people and communities."

Equity in Education Forum, "An Invitation to Participate," 2001

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Produced November 2001 by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission
Copies of this report are available from Commission offices in Regina and Saskatoon.

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K-12 Education Equity Report, 2000-2001

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K-12 Education Equity Report, 2000-2001

1. Response to a Crisis

Education equity began in 1984, when the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission focused on a crisis in the delivery of education to Aboriginal people. Studies showed that over ninety percent of Aboriginal students dropped out of school before completing grade twelve.

After public consultation, the commission released its 1985 *Education Equity Report*. The report concluded Aboriginal students did not receive the same benefits and opportunities from the educational system as their non-Aboriginal classmates. It stated equality in education requires more than an equal opportunity to enter the educational system. Students are unlikely to succeed if they feel like outsiders in schools that fail to meet their needs or permit discriminatory behaviour.

The commission asked school divisions with five percent or more Aboriginal students to develop education equity plans for approval under section 47 of *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*. Initially, these plans had five components: hiring more teachers of Aboriginal ancestry; increasing Aboriginal content in the curriculum; increasing parental involvement in school activities; reviewing school policies and practices for bias or systemic barriers; and providing cross-cultural training for teachers. Later, two additional components were added: hiring more Aboriginal people into non-teaching positions; and developing anti-discrimination policies and procedures.

The response to the commission's request was encouraging. By 1989, most school divisions with significant enrolments of Aboriginal students had education equity plans. Today, almost 94,000 of Saskatchewan's K-12 students are in divisions with approved plans.[1]

2. Shared and Expanded Vision of Education Equity

During the 1993-1994 review of the *Human Rights Code*, many groups and individuals said education equity should be strengthened and expanded. They recommended that education equity be made mandatory in all Saskatchewan schools

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1. This includes Regina Public School Division (RPSD), which has approximately 22,600 students. Instead of an education equity plan RPSD has an employment equity plan, which allows increased efforts to hire Aboriginal staff. In addition, RPSD has adopted a comprehensive human rights policy.

because all students benefit from a good understanding of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal peoples. They also recommended that the program be expanded to include gender equity and ensure equality of benefit to all students including Aboriginal and visible minority students and students with disabilities.[2]

Subsequently, the commission joined with all the major players in the K-12 education community to form the Equity in Education Forum, a network and advocacy group.[3] In November 1997, the Forum and the Minister of Justice released a policy framework entitled *Our Children, Our Communities and Our Future.* This document articulates a common vision to promote equity in Saskatchewan schools, setting out policies and action plans for ensuring fair and respectful treatment for all students. The foreword states:

> "Ensuring that each person has equitable opportunity and benefits, regardless of ethnic origin, physical or mental disability, religious preference, culture, gender, family structure and lifestyle, social or economic background or other difference, is a critical priority. Excellence within Saskatchewan's education system will only be achieved when education equity is a reality." [4]

The Forum identified specific groups of students who are unlikely to receive equal benefit from the K-12 system without proactive equity initiatives. These included, among others, Indian and Métis students, students with exceptional needs, rural students, northern students, and students at risk of school failure because of social and emotional problems such as poverty, family breakdown, violence, neglect and teen pregnancy. The Forum also expressed a need for gender equity in the school environment. [5]

In its policy framework, the Forum stressed the need for collaborative processes and shared responsibility.

> "By working together we believe that we can solve broad, complex issues that may be beyond our individual control. It is understood that along with shared responsibility, there is mutual benefit in achieving the vision for equity." [6]

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2. Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, *Renewing the Vision: Human Rights in Saskatchewan, 1996*, p. 88.
3. The original partners were the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, Saskatchewan Education, the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and the League of Education Administrators, Directors and Superintendents. The group has expanded to include representatives from Gabriel Dumont Institute, the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina.
4. Equity in Education Forum, *Our Children, Our Communities and Our Future*, (SaskEd, 1997) p. ii.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
6. *Ibid.*, p.11.

3. Achievements and Innovations

Most school divisions with approved plans now have 10 to 15 years of experience with education equity. They have undertaken many creative initiatives with regard to the seven traditional components of equity plans, outlined above. To give just a few examples: divisions have made concerted efforts to recruit Aboriginal staff; they have hired Aboriginal elders, counsellors, and home-school liaison workers; they have introduced Aboriginal content across the curriculum and developed a variety of equity resources including web sites with materials for use at the classroom level; and they have developed innovative, practical measures to facilitate parental involvement.

In some cases, divisions have taken significant steps to assess and improve their equity initiatives. The Saskatoon Catholic School Division, for example, organized a major Aboriginal Education Consultation in 2000-2001 to address the needs and concerns of Aboriginal people within the provincial school system. The report on this consultation will be produced in 2001-2002.

A number of school divisions are embracing the expanded concept of equity in education. Saskatoon Public School Division, for example, now focuses on gender equity, Aboriginal students, students with exceptional learning needs, students at risk and visible minority students. In June 2000, its ad hoc committee on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered issues presented a report and recommendations to the Superintendent of Support Services. North West Catholic School Division has established two separate education equity committees: one to address the broad equity issues raised by *Our Children, Our Communities and Our Future*; and the other to preserve the energy and momentum of efforts focusing on Aboriginal students.

4. Indicators of Success

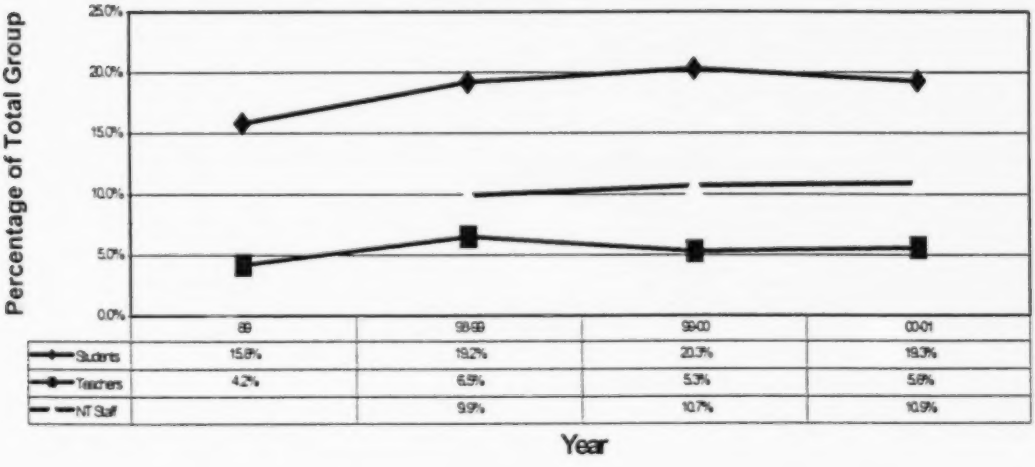
(A) Quantitative

An obvious measure of success for education equity plans is a declining dropout rate among Aboriginal students. However, it is extremely difficult for school divisions to collect accurate data on this subject. Some school divisions make commendable efforts to track the progress and retention of Aboriginal students, but encounter serious obstacles. These include the lack of a convenient, consistent process for identifying Aboriginal students, and the inability to determine whether a particular student has left school altogether or simply transferred to another division.

There is an urgent need for a province-wide statistical system that can track the progress of Aboriginal and other students. The commission strongly recommends that Saskatchewan Education consider developing such a system in the near future.

Statistical information collected by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission shows an increase in the representation of Aboriginal students, teachers and non-teaching staff in school divisions with approved plans. (See Figure A.) Since 1989, the representation of Aboriginal students within the total student population has increased from 15.8 percent to 19.3 percent, while the representation of Aboriginal teachers has increased from 4.2 percent to 5.6 percent. The proportion of Aboriginal non-teaching (NT) staff has increased from 9.9 percent to 10.9 percent since 1997-98.

Figure A - Increase in Representation Since 1989



	89	98-99	99-00	00-01
Students	15.8%	19.2%	20.3%	19.3%
Teachers	4.2%	6.5%	5.3%	5.6%
NT Staff		9.9%	10.7%	10.9%

The commission has asked school divisions to increase the representation of Aboriginal staff in order to provide positive Aboriginal role models within the school system. If a reasonable goal is for staff to reflect the make-up of the student population, it is clear that education equity plans have not met that goal. The gap between the representation of Aboriginal students and teachers has slightly widened since 1989: from 11.6 percent to 13.7 percent. Almost every school division reports difficulty recruiting and retaining Aboriginal teachers, partly because of competition from the growing number of First Nations schools.

It must be acknowledged that divisions have had some success recruiting Aboriginal teachers, whose representation has increased by approximately one-third since 1989. Many school divisions make determined efforts to hire Aboriginal teachers. For example, they invite applications from students in the Teacher Education Programs , offer internships to Aboriginal student teachers, review their hiring practices for systemic barriers, include Aboriginal people on interview panels, and advertise themselves as affirmative hiring boards. Nevertheless, the projected growth of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population suggests that the percentage of Aboriginal students in the provincial K-12 system will continue to increase, and that the gap

between Aboriginal student and teacher representation may widen. Some school divisions with approved plans encourage Aboriginal students to enter teacher training. There will be an even greater need for Aboriginal teachers in the years ahead, and for innovative methods of recruiting them.

(B) Qualitative

Some indicators of success cannot be quantified. They involve matters like quality of school environment, and improvements in understanding and respect. Just a few of the qualitative indicators identified by school divisions are listed below.

- Perception of school based staff of the importance of education equity.
- Creating a safe and inclusive school community.
- Culturally affirmative and cross-cultural educational programs for students.
- Meeting the diverse academic needs of students.
- Addressing socio-economic needs of students.
- Ensuring gender equity.
- Academic achievement of Aboriginal students.
- Participation of Aboriginal adults in meetings and events and on school boards.

A Journey of Change

The commission's education equity program will continue to evolve, in response to changing circumstances and community needs. Our province's growing Aboriginal population makes the original purpose of education equity as relevant as it was in 1985. At the same time, we recognize that all students have the right to a genuinely equal education, regardless of gender, ancestry, disability, economic status, sexual orientation or other factors that have created disadvantage in the past.

The challenge of education equity invites the collaboration of many organizations and individuals, but its rewards are also far-reaching. In the words of the Equity in Education Forum,

> "Education equity enhances the quality of life of all Saskatchewan people, as our education system empowers each individual and creates the conditions for full and equal participation, opportunity and benefit." [7]

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6. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Table A
Representation of Aboriginal Students in School Divisions With Approved Plans

School Division	Plan Adopted	1989			1998-1999			1999-2000			2000-2001		
		Students			Students			Students			Students		
		Total	Aboriginal		Total	Aboriginal		Total	Aboriginal		Total	Aboriginal	
			No.	Percent		No.	Percent		No.	Percent		No.	Percent
Battlefords *								3,405	950	27.9%	2,994	728	24.3%
Biggar	1987	931	125	13.4%	946	170	18.0%	983	200	20.3%	1,002	222	22.2%
Broadview	1988	1,450	231	15.9%	959	117	12.2%	941	117	12.4%	929	160	17.2%
Cupar	1988	1,505	198	13.2%	1,012	60	5.9%	940	38	4.0%	935	35	3.7%
Indian Head	1987	1,707	409	24.0%	1,675	557	33.3%	1,664	586	35.2%	1,520	483	31.8%
Lands West *					2,554	142	5.6%	2,430	133	5.5%	2,300	110	4.8%
Northern Lakes	1987	1,541	311	20.2%	973	196	20.1%	936	136	14.5%	903	108	12.0%
Northern Lights	1988	4,454	3,786	85.0%	4,392	4,041	92.0%	4,652	3,954	85.0%	4,361	4,010	92.0%
North West Catholic *					2,014	424	21.1%	1,959	445	22.7%	1,993	472	23.7%
Prince Albert Catholic	1989	2,471	606	24.5%	2,783	927	33.3%	2,813	1,167	41.5%	2,825	1,098	38.9%
Regina Catholic	1987	9,758	800	8.2%	11,015	1,234	11.2%	11,016	1,066	9.7%	10,712	1,087	10.1%
Regina Public (a)	1994(a)							23,031	5,000	21.7%	22,600	3,800	16.8%
Saskatoon Catholic	1987	12,879	1,165	9.0%	14,896	1,819	12.2%	14,952	1,855	12.4%	15,225	1,921	12.6%
Saskatoon Public	1987	21,898	1,735	7.9%	21,670	2,872	13.3%	22,788	3,326	14.6%	22,138	3,387	15.3%
Scenic Valley	1997				1,338	407	30.4%	1,216	246	20.2%	1,134	326	28.7%
Turtleford	1998				1,201	83	6.9%	1,145	135	11.8%	1,072	50	4.7%
Wadena	1988	2,027	220	10.9%	1,556	226	14.5%	1,537	258	16.8%	1,349	122	9.0%
Total		60,621	9,586	15.8%	68,984	13,275	19.2%	96,408	19,612	20.3%	93,992	18,119	19.3%

* These divisions were formed in the 1990s through amalgamation, incorporating school divisions that already had approved plans. Statistics are provided from the time of amalgamation only.

(a) In 1994 Regina Public School Board adopted an employment equity plan, which enables it to take positive steps to hire Aboriginal staff.

Table B
Representation of Aboriginal Teachers in School Divisions With Approved Plans

School Division	Plan Adopted	1989			1998-1999			1999-2000			2000-2001		
		Teachers			Teachers			Teachers			Teachers		
		Total	Aboriginal		Total	Aboriginal		Total	Aboriginal		Total	Aboriginal	
			No.	Percent		No.	Percent		No.	Percent		No.	Percent
Battlefords *								190.0	9.0	4.7%	191.0	10.0	5.2%
Biggar	1987	66.5	1.0	1.5%	65.0	1.0	1.5%	65.0	3.0	4.6%	65.0	4.0	6.2%
Broadview	1988	90.5	1.0	1.1%	63.9	1.0	1.6%	59.6	1.0	1.7%	60.0	1.0	1.7%
Cupar	1988	90.3	0.0	0.0%	64.2	1.0	1.6%	57.6	0.0	0.0%	60.8	0.0	0.0%
Indian Head	1987	101.3	1.0	1.0%	98.8	6.0	6.1%	98.5	6.0	6.1%	93.1	6.0	6.4%
Lands West *					158.0	2.0	1.3%	150.0	2.0	1.3%	142.0	2.0	1.4%
Northern Lakes	1987	100.0	2.0	2.0%	67.0	3.0	4.5%	67.0	1.0	1.5%	62.5	1.0	1.6%
Northern Lights	1988	283.0	71.0	25.1%	267.0	81.0	30.3%	274.0	75.0	27.4%	302.0	78.0	25.8%
North West Catholic *					109.5	5.0	4.6%	107.7	8.0	7.4%	111.9	8.0	7.1%
Prince Albert Catholic	1989	148.7	2.0	1.3%	165.0	17.0	10.3%	173.0	14.0	8.1%	173.0	25.0	14.5%
Regina Catholic	1987	486.6	3.0	0.6%	600.0	30.0	5.0%	612.0	30.0	4.9%	665.0	29.0	4.4%
Regina Public (a)	1994(a)				1324.0	41.0	3.1%	1324.0	44.0	3.3%	1304.0	47.0	3.6%
Saskatoon Catholic	1987	627.5	14.0	2.2%	845.0	40.8	4.8%	828.6	44.3	5.3%	944.0	47.0	5.0%
Saskatoon Public	1987	1150.0	34.0	3.0%	1336.0	65.0	4.9%	1492.0	66.0	4.4%	1442.0	69.0	4.8%
Scenic Valley	1997				89.0	1.0	1.1%	85.7	1.0	1.2%	90.0	2.0	2.2%
Turtleford	1998				73.8	0.0	0.0%	71.0	0.0	0.0%	83.0	0.0	0.0%
Wadena	1988	112.5	0.0	0.0%	100.0	1.0	1.0%	100.0	2.0	2.0%	89.0	3.0	3.4%
Total		3256.9	129.0	4.2%	5426.1	295.8	6.5%	5755.7	306.3	5.3%	5878.3	332.0	5.6%

* These divisions were formed in the 1990s through amalgamation, incorporating school divisions that already had approved plans. Statistics are provided from the time of amalgamation only.

(a) In 1994 Regina Public School Board adopted an employment equity plan, which enables it to take positive steps to hire Aboriginal staff.

Table C
Representation of Aboriginal Non-Teaching Staff in School Divisions with Approved Plans

School Division	Plan Adopted	1997-1998			1998-1999			1999-2000			2000-2001		
		Non-Teaching Staff			Non-Teaching Staff			Non-Teaching Staff			Non-Teaching Staff		
		Total	Aboriginal		Total	Aboriginal		Total	Aboriginal		Total	Aboriginal	
			No.	Percent		No.	Percent		No.	Percent		No.	Percent
Battlefords *								103.0	15.0	14.6%	132.0	11.0	8.3%
Biggar	1987	N/A			60.0	2.0	3.3%	60.0	5.0	8.3%	60.0	8.0	13.3%
Broadview	1988	40.0	1.0	2.5%	40.0	1.0	2.5%	40.0	1.0	2.5%	40.0	1.0	2.5%
Cupar	1988	27.0	1.0	3.7%	27.0	4.0	14.8%	26.0	0.0	0.0%	35.0	0.0	0.0%
Indian Head	1987	35.9	7.5	20.9%	39.0	7.5	19.2%	45.0	10.0	22.2%	39.6	5.0	12.6%
Lands West *		138.0	0.0	0.0%	138.0	1.0	0.7%	134.0	2.0	1.5%	125.0	2.0	1.6%
Northern Lakes	1987	85.0	11.0	12.9%	60.4	2.0	3.3%	86.8	5.5	6.3%	81.8	0.0	0.0%
Northern Lights	1988	164.0	141.0	86.0%	168.0	143.0	85.1%	221.0	169.0	76.5%	227.0	175.0	77.1%
North West Catholic *		35.0	3.0	8.6%	36.0	4.0	11.1%	57.0	6.0	10.5%	74.0	11.0	14.9%
Prince Albert Catholic	1989	61.0	12.0	19.7%	82.0	18.0	22.0%	101.0	22.0	21.8%	96.0	23.0	24.0%
Regina Catholic	1987	267.0	9.0	3.4%	302.0	9.0	3.0%	302.0	9.0	3.0%	251.0	9.0	3.6%
Regina Public (a)	1994(a)	665.0	49.0	7.4%	701.0	57.0	8.1%	720.0	62.0	8.6%	773.0	65.0	8.4%
Saskatoon Catholic	1987	580.0	25.0	4.3%	500.0	23.0	4.6%	465.3	25.4	5.5%	539.0	30.0	5.6%
Saskatoon Public	1987	580.0	7.0	1.2%	700.0	12.0	1.7%	830.0	15.0	1.8%	790.0	21.0	2.7%
Scenic Valley	1997	42.0	6.0	14.3%	53.0	8.0	15.1%	50.8	7.0	13.8%	54.0	9.0	16.7%
Turtleford	1998	25.0	3.0	12.0%	25.0	3.0	12.0%	16.0	1.0	6.3%	73.0	5.0	6.8%
Wadena	1988	63.0	2.0	3.2%	63.0	2.0	3.2%	65.0	2.0	3.1%	65.0	2.0	3.1%
Total		2807.9	277.5	9.9%	2994.4	296.5	9.9%	3322.9	356.9	10.7%	3455.4	377.0	10.9%

* These divisions were formed in the 1990s through amalgamation, incorporating school divisions that already had approved plans. Statistics are provided from the time of amalgamation only.

(a) In 1994 Regina Public School Board adopted an employment equity plan, which enables it to take positive steps to hire Aboriginal staff.